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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an action research project at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, that helps student teachers transform into teachers with developed cultural identities. Student teachers tend to be white, English-speaking females who are being prepared by educators much like them. The project encourages them to reflect on their beliefs about education and reconsider those that do not meet the social reconstructionist philosophy. Students are actively engaged in examining assumptions about themselves to impact how they understand their role and influence as teachers. Through seminar discussions, pre- and postobservation conferences, and informal communication with students, their teacher documents how and when they examine assumptions about themselves and how this shapes their beliefs about teachers, students, and schooling. Discussion is critical in helping students examine their beliefs and experiences. When facilitated appropriately, discussion helps the transformation process through critical reflection. This paper describes the seminar model of discussion used, concluding that using discussion is a significant step toward persuading student teachers to challenge their own beliefs and assumptions. The combination of field experiences in diverse settings and weekly discussions provides opportunities for students to examine what they believe and how that actually influences classroom activities. (Contains 33 references.) (SM)

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Using Discussion in the Student Teaching Seminar to Facilitate Transformation

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Introduction and Statement of the Problem

One of the major objectives of the UW-Madison elementary education program, as well as many others, is to prepare teachers with "the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to work effectively with a diverse student population" (Zeichner, 1996, p. 133) and who are "both willing and able to reflect on the origins, purposes, and consequences of their actions" (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). This critical reflection contributes to transform prospective teachers' thinking about cultural diversity by helping them to develop a conscious knowledge of "the influence of culture on the way we personally make sense of and respond to the physical, social, and spiritual world" (Hollins, 1997, p. 102). The cultural identities of preservice teachers have been largely ignored and are clearly in need of study (Zeichner & Noffke, in press).

The majority of students in teacher education programs continues to be white English-speaking females (Zimpher & Howey, 1992) who have successfully negotiated the education system (based on their presence in a university), and they continue to be prepared by teacher educators much like themselves (Howey, 1994). In addition, students of education typically bring with them "cultural myths" (Britzman, 1991) and an "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) which often provide views of teaching that are personal and non-analytical. Potential teachers need to examine their experiences as students in a system which, in many cases, fostered their academic and personal success. Central to the effective preparation of these "typical" prospective teachers by "typical" teacher educators is the transformation process, a disruption of cultural assumptions.

Haberman (1991) argues that because cultural disruption with young white females is extremely difficult we should instead prepare adults with multiple life experiences to be future

teachers. Although I think some of his suggestions for reform have merit, I would argue that this change is not going to happen soon when the need for teachers is rising. Something must be done to better prepare preservice teachers in the education programs which continue to admit traditionally young white females. Additionally, undergoing transformation is not something which benefits only inexperienced young white women. Nor is it only beneficial for white teachers who teach non-white students.

I arrive at this problem through my experiences as a student teaching supervisor for two years in the UW-Madison elementary education program. While I am in graduate school continuously experiencing greater understanding of myself and others, I have more keenly noticed how our cultural privileges disguise the problems we encounter in teaching. All of my student teachers are very concerned about meeting the needs of all children and yet are very often perplexed in how to do that. I believe that much of that perplexity is borne out of an inability to effectively understand the students who are different from them because of the student teachers' experiences in, and assumptions about, teaching and learning.

In this paper I will introduce my action research question related to the transformation of student teachers. I will interpret the meaning of transformation as well as its effect. Finally, I will address the potential for the use of discussion in the transformation process and provide analysis of two discussions held in my student teaching seminar.

I recognize that there are many significant issues surrounding this concept that are not addressed in this paper. One example is the experiences of students of color in the transformation process and my seminar. Because of the scope of this paper, and the fact that there were only white students in my class, I will primarily address the experiences of a white teacher educator

preparing white student teachers to teach all students. Another limit of this paper is that it does not address the importance of cultural immersion for transformation. The literature shows that the most successful way to raise cultural consciousness is to provide field experiences in which preservice teachers have the opportunity to work with a diverse student population (e.g. Zeichner, 1996). Although class discussions are an important part of examining culture, it is scarcely effective without the "experiential components" (Nieto, 1992).

The Action Research Question

The goal of my action research project is that I assist student teachers in their process of transformation. Toward that I engage in strategies which I anticipate will encourage them to reflect on their beliefs about education and hopefully reconsider those that do not meet the social reconstructionist philosophy. However, this is not my only goal. Because action research is a "lived experience," (Sumara & Carson, 1997) I fully expect to be partially transformed myself throughout my self-study.

I continually struggle with refining and focusing the intent of my inquiry. Sumara and Carson (1997) agree that action researchers not only "acknowledge the importance of self and collective interpretation, but they deeply understand that these interpretations are always in a state of becoming and can never be fixed into predetermined and static categories" (p. xviii). My action research question has changed and evolved over the previous year and is now this:

> How can I as a supervisor assist student teachers in challenging their and/or common assumptions about teachers, students, and schooling?

This paper will specifically address the use of class discussion in challenging assumptions.

The Transformation Process

Definition of Transformation

A significant feature of the transformation process is a disruption of values or cultural beliefs through critical reflection with the goal of more socially just teaching. It requires teachers to think critically and challenge ideas of power and control as they are constructed in the world and mapped onto themselves. It is a continuous process not an end. Just as in teaching, one does not achieve a level of mastery and then quit growing. The goal is that through better understanding ourselves we will better understand our students, especially those that are different from us (Nieto, 1999).

The concept of transformation has many comparable terms in the literature: for example, emancipation (Ellsworth, 1989), empowerment (McLaren as cited in Sleeter, 1991), cultural therapy (Spindler & Spindler, 1993), critical pedagogy (Brookfield, 1995), and developing a "minority perspective" (Sleeter, 1995). McLaren (1989) stresses the social purpose of empowerment, defining it as "the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (as cited in Sleeter, 1991, p. 186). Another aim of transformation is to help teachers understand their own cultural positions and to reflect on and analyze the reasons why they might find the behavior of a culturally different person confusing or objectionable. The transformation of teachers can also lead to more democratic classrooms where teachers recognize the power dynamics in educational processes and society (Brookfield, 1995).

The necessity for transformation is usually, though not always, based on the idea that pre-

service teachers are primarily white and of the dominant culture. Certainly critical reflection about one's assumptions is necessary and can be a transformative experience for any person, regardless of culture. However, those who belong to the dominant/power culture, as do most practicing and preservice teachers, may have less experience in recognizing their privilege, and thus others' oppression in our society (McIntosh, 1989).

I understand this process through the lens of a white middle-class female teacher educator working with students from a similar culture as myself. However, students enter a classroom with varying needs and characteristics and teacher education classrooms are no different. Some education students enter the program experienced in challenging assumptions while others have rarely thoughtfully considered the societal influences on themselves and their profession. Occasionally my student teachers are from traditionally marginalized cultures or have had profound experiences with being the "other" which have created opportunities for them to reassess their perspectives about particular beliefs. It is my responsibility to acknowledge and assess individual students' needs as I assist them in aspects of the transformation process.

It should be recognized that this process to challenge assumptions is undertaken with assumptions. Most of my suppositions, despite my own ongoing transformation, are unconscious and waiting to be discovered. Two working assumptions I make are that by-and-large my students are white and have successfully negotiated the education system. The assumptions that are often made about all preservice teachers being female, middle-class and mono-lingual do not necessarily fit with my experiences, and I have become more careful over the years to try to dispel any preconceived notions about my students.

Because of our membership in the dominant culture, teachers often experienced school as

"good" students. During the time that I have been supervising student teachers, I have noticed many of them struggling to make sense of how to achieve in this altogether ambiguous experience of student teaching. Many of them (but not all) define themselves as perfectionists and often those who do not use the term exhibit the symptoms. Regardless of whether or not they are perfectionists per se, every one of them has successfully negotiated the education system well enough to be accepted into a program with high, and for the most part traditional, standards.

A heightened awareness of my membership in the dominant culture has had one of the most profound influences on me personally. Continuous revelations about how my culture shapes how I view others are astonishing to me. I am learning to see inequity in places I never thought to look. I think this "enlightenment" makes me a better teacher because I spend more energy trying to understand perspectives different than mine, rather than judging those that do not match my paradigm. I feel more human because of it. I naturally want the student teachers I supervise to experience this as well.

Evidence of Transformation

Within the parameters of one semester of a five-year education program, I attempt to actively engage students in an examination of assumptions about themselves to affect the way they understand their role and influence as teachers. This first step requires pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their own culture and how that shapes their belief system. Through seminar discussions, pre- and post-observation conferences, and informal communication with students I am able to document how and when they examine assumptions about themselves as well as how this shapes their beliefs about teachers, students, and schooling. Students also provide multiple feedback to me throughout the semester where some of them explicitly describe how seminar or

observation conferences have assisted them in rethinking why and how they do what they do because of issues raised throughout the semester.

One of my goals is to help student teachers have enough experiences with classroom life that they feel able to function within their own classrooms while encouraging them to remain open to the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in the teaching profession. I want them to realize that for every "right answer" or "solution" there is historical and social meaning in that answer or solution so that fixing the problem is never simple. I want them to realize the self-defeating conception of meeting the needs of every single child, every day, every year. But I also want them to have a rationale for what they do and be able to defend their methods and curriculum as being equitable for more than just the "well-behaved" "successful" middle-class white kids.

Each of my student teachers has an individual perspective, though they often share viewpoints based on their similar experiences within our society. One indication of transformation is an ability to reposition one's perspective. As Sleeter points out, "Repositioning one's perspective requires recognizing that one is situated in an unequal context, and one's perspective grows partially out of one's situation" (1995, p. 417). When teachers have acquired this disposition, they are likely to better understand alternative perspectives such as those of students and parents. In addition to suggesting alternative perspectives in discussions, I also encourage this perspective-taking by using teaching vignettes in which student teachers role-play the perspectives of the many characters within the vignette.[1]

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[1]One example of a vignette involves a child who has trouble completing his homework. After the teacher makes many attempts at resolving the issue, the child's father shows up at school and verbally attacks the teacher. Students are asked to "defend" each character's perspective and often come to new potential understandings of the situation.

Teachers who exhibit awareness of their own oppression and unearned social privileges tend to be aware of their students' (Nieto, 1999). For example, a teacher who reflects on her experiences being raised by a single mother has insights into that family structure that may help her understand her student who also comes from a similar home life. I want to see student teachers question the cultural influences on the terms (e.g. "ready," "appropriate," "at-risk") they apply to children.

Finally, beyond the competent performance of fair and equitable instructional objectives, I tell all of my student teachers I want to see them "be" with their students. I describe "being" with the students as a genuine and responsive presence which allows teachers to experience a relationship with their students. I look for examples of these behaviors to determine whether or not students are experiencing transformation. If I do not witness these behaviors on a regular basis, I attempt to provide more opportunities in seminar and observation conferences for the student teacher and I to explore their beliefs and assumptions. In the process, I try to remember to examine my own assumptions about my students' assumptions.

The Context and Importance of the Research Question

I supervise ten student teachers in the final semester of the UW-Madison elementary education program. In addition to observing students in their classrooms, I conduct a weekly two-hour seminar during which we engage in a variety of activities but primarily discussion. I am using the method of action research, self-study in particular, to illuminate and better understand my struggle as a supervisor to assist student teachers in the transformation process. My action research question focuses on how I might support student teachers in disrupting their cultural assumptions about teachers, students, and schooling. I believe that through examination of their

assumptions, student teachers will be more likely to consider and understand alternative cultural perspectives thus better meeting the needs of students who are different from themselves.

The UW-Madison elementary education program is based on a social reconstructionist philosophy which advocates that teacher educators prepare teachers to work toward altering the inequities in our education system. In order to be an agent of change with student teachers, I believe I need to have a supportive and nurturing relationship with them. This belief that good relationships influence behavior stems from my general philosophies about how women view themselves and others through their relationships. These ideas are drawn from the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and are also closely related to Nel Noddings' (1984) work on the ethic of care within the teaching profession.

Discussion as Teaching Strategy

Discussion is critical to assisting students in examining their beliefs and their experiences. The literature supports the potential transformative effectiveness of discussion (e.g. Wade, 1994), and it is appropriate for the context in which I work with students. Dillon (1994) defines discussion as

> "a particular form of group interaction where members join together in addressing a question of common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answer, enhancing their knowledge or understanding, their appreciation or judgement, their decision, resolution or action over the matter at issue....People do not discuss experiences whose meaning is plain to them, nor their indisputable feelings or incontestable values. When they do discuss these things they have some question about them and they join with others to form an answer" (p. 8).

The challenge for teacher educators, then, is to "dispute" feelings or "contest" values in order to provide a reason for discussion. And the "answers" may not be in the form students have come to expect them, but a better understanding of why we need to examine our own assumptions and

beliefs.

Some common ways to generate discussion are through case studies, classroom stories, life stories, speakers, videos, academic texts, or journal entries. In my seminar I have used the previous week's journal prompts, the student teachers' experiences in their classrooms, journal articles, teaching vignettes, as well as a transcript from a previous seminar to prompt discussions. Because my student teachers solicit many "how-to" discussions, I try to balance the practical topics with what they would perceive as more theory-like themes. In the future, I would like to experiment more with films and autobiographical stories.

When facilitated appropriately, discussions can assist in the process of transformation through critical reflection. The dialectical nature of discussion allows participants to share and interact with multiple perspectives in a way that written reflection does not provide. To increase student participation in seminar discussions, Wade (1994) suggests using relevant topics, encouraging students to draw upon their own experiences, giving students opportunity to prepare in advance, and producing an ethic of care in the classroom. "The challenge for reflective teacher educators is to nurture students' confidence in the worth of their ideas while also encouraging them to reflect on and rethink their views" (p. 240).

In order to produce an ethic of care with my student teachers, I begin most seminar meetings with a community-building activity. Sometimes the students request the opportunity to plan the activity. I feel these activities have improved the atmosphere within the classroom which I believe leads to a greater opportunity to share ideas and opinions. On feedback cards, students have used the following words to describe seminar: "open and safe," "relaxed," "casual atmosphere,"and "flexible." When asked what was working for them in this relationship,

numerous student teachers commented that they feel they can share openly. They have also described me as supportive, encouraging, and a good facilitator.

A safe environment is crucial because discussions that foster critical reflection often require students to subject their ideas to peer critique. This can make students particularly vulnerable and defensive. Julie Andrzejewski (1995) suggests methods which reduce student defensiveness and establish openness to discussions about sensitive subjects such as prejudice and discrimination. She prefers to be respectfully candid and direct in her expectation that the students challenge many of the beliefs they have been taught, but explains that the students have ultimate control over what they choose to accept. Andrzejewski recognizes the complexity of teaching oppressors about oppression. If the instructor insists that students adopt certain attitudes, then this restriction on their personal freedom will impede their openness to new information. On the other hand, our ethical and professional responsibility is to prepare teachers who will attempt to provide a socially just education for every student.

Some dispute whether or not democratic dialogue can occur because of inherent power relations between students and teachers. "It seems impossibly naive to think there can be anything like a genuine sharing of voices in the classroom. What does seem possible, on the other hand, is an attempt to recognize the power differentials present and to understand how they impinge upon what is sayable and doable in that specific context" (Orner, 1992, p. 81).

Despite the complexities of conducting discussions for transformation, they provide a forum in which to bridge the student teachers' current experiences in their classrooms with larger ideas about social justice. In addition to class discussions with a specific topic, there are certainly opportunities in less-formal conversations to promote transformation. I often raise questions

during the pre-observation conference and post-observation conference which require students to reflect on why they do things the way they do. One student teacher has commented, "I have also enjoyed the conferences we have had after observations. I have had a lot of light-bulb moments in our conversations and have found the time to reflect very useful" (Schulte, 1999d).

Analysis of our First Discussion

The primary model of discussion I use is the seminar model, the purpose of which is to "enlarge understanding of ideas, values, and issues through intensive conversation about selected texts" (Gray, 1989, p. 17). Early in the semester, I planned to structure a seminar discussion about Peggy McIntosh's (1989) article, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*[2], but it was clear from my student teachers' journals and their questions in conferences that they were very concerned about how they were going to daily meet the academic needs of the variety of children in their classroom. They focused on the need to learn techniques and methods for different ability levels. Most of them consulted their cooperating teachers for ideas such as keeping notes on individual students' achievement, enrichment activities for those who finish early, and creating spelling lists or math problems which are easily modified for emerging learners (Schulte, 1999a).

These solutions are an example of the pragmatic way many teachers approach teaching. I felt the student teachers were genuinely interested in learning how to help their students, however I also wanted to disrupt this tendency to "fix the problem" and focus on why it is a problem. Their final semester, when these student teachers will soon be entering the "real world" of teaching, is a

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[2] In this article McIntosh provides a list of conditions in which she feels she is privileged primarily because she is white.

precarious time to be withholding information that will make them feel comfortable and competent. I choose to reveal some uncertainty and ambiguity so that my student teachers do not learn to see teaching as only a series of problems to be solved but instead as a way to change our society for the better.

Because seminar discussions should be relevant to students' needs, I originally set aside my plan for a discussion about white privilege. I decided to take a leap of faith, to go into seminar with their questions about meeting needs and improvise as a facilitator with the hopes of incorporating my original discussion ideas into this one. First, I asked the students to talk in small groups so that everyone would get a significant opportunity to share their frustrations and vent about their situations. Then to the large group I gave the discussion question "Why are we feeling frustrated about meeting the needs of many different students in our room?" I told the student teachers that this day I just wanted to focus on why they were frustrated and not deal with solutions. I delayed discussing solutions in hopes that students would use the theoretical discussion to make their own connections and solve their problems in practice.

Students told stories of their frustrations which included too many children in a classroom, too many different ability levels to meet in one lesson, lack of support from special education staff, combination classrooms, pressure within the teacher education program to not let kids "fall through the cracks," and the change in school and family values. Within these stories student teachers shared their personal experiences as students. Ashleigh[3] appreciated being in a combination classroom as a child, but as a teacher she was frustrated by trying to reach all the different ability levels across two grades. Chuck recognized as a young child that he did not fit

[3] All students' names are pseudonyms and were chosen by them

into the "cookie cutter" expectations of his teachers and thinks it is important to remember those experiences when teaching his students. When the discussion turned to the changing values in our society, Juanita shared that her childhood experiences in a middle class neighborhood with two parents who respected the teacher's authority were different than her experiences in her student teaching placement. Samantha suggested that growing up with a single mom causes her to empathize with her students who come from single parent homes.

Drawing upon Lockwood's (1996) teacher roles, I served as both a Socratic cross-examiner as well as a nurturing facilitator. I encouraged students to express their ideas while probing their answers just a little bit. As students told their stories I usually followed up with exploratory questions such as:

> "Why do we have split (combination grade) classrooms?"
> "What about you didn't allow you to fall through the cracks?"
> "What about being a good student, what about that experience helps us to understand or prevents us from understanding how to meet the needs of kids who aren't having their needs met?"
> "How much is fifties values, how much of it really happened but we just didn't talk about it?"
> "Why do you think a parent would say that? Is there an explanation for that behavior that would not qualify that parent as less than a "good" parent?"
> "But the question is what do you define as 'qualified'?" (Schulte, 1999b)

The students seemed to respond to my questions by reflecting on their own experiences and asking questions of others. I believe the first hour of class was similar to a Socratic seminar, in which the discussion moved "in accordance with what is said by the participants, rather than in deference to a hard and fast lesson plan" (Gray, 1989). I reiterated the personal stories students had shared to emphasize how our experiences shape our beliefs as teachers and then introduced the McIntosh (1989) article and asked them to read it silently in class. With a promise to come

back to solutions to their problems at a later date. I transitioned to a more teacher-directed discussion with an intended destination in terms of teacher objectives. I assumed the role of what Lockwood (1996) calls a "determined advocate" (p. 29).

What followed was more of a class review of the article and my expounding on the ideas presented in it. I started with the question "What kinds of implications does this have for you as a teacher?" Throughout the discussion I made more statements and asked fewer questions, and the questions I did ask usually had a predetermined answer in my mind. I feel my tone changed from the first half of class where I was genuinely probing to the second half where I was trying to convince them. There were many ideas and examples I wanted to get across to help my students to understand how many things we take for granted. Sometimes I get overwhelmed by how much I am trying to cram into one semester, let alone one seminar meeting. Yet I am careful to try to provide provocative food for thought and not zealous indoctrination.

A few of the students disputed some aspects of the article. Sandy felt McIntosh groups all males into the same unenlightened group and reifies the idea of male dominance. "Because this may have been true of males when my dad was growing up, but most of the males I know don't fit into this article and maybe I'm in a different group but I feel like we're clumping them into this one thing and saying this is what they all believe." Sandy also shared her experiences with the behavior of an African American student in her class and how she feels she is "letting him off the hook by saying, 'oh, that's a cultural thing'"(Schulte, 1999b). Finally, Kelly suggested that although all of her students were white, there were still twenty-five different cultures to anticipate. She said, "I read this and I understand it, but I'm trying to downplay this (race) idea" (Schulte, 1999b).

At the same time, I felt students were sharing personal stories that supported the article. Chuck, coincidentally the only white male, testified to his experiences of being the "other" in a foreign country and defended his "male awareness." He said,"I think that's why [in] a lot of schools it's hard to change the atmosphere of the school or the way we think about teaching because it worked for us." Chuck's personal experiences and the texts he read before student teaching (Lisa Delpit, 1995, for one) clearly provided him a framework for this discussion that some of the other students did not have. "The balance is giving them skills while still appreciating what they have at home and saying, as she (Delpit) points out in her book, 'Hey, my way of saying this is much more fluent, this sounds so much more beautiful, but I have to be able to say it your way in order to be in your society'" (Schulte, 1999b). At one point in the conversation Samantha said, "One part of meeting kids' needs is knowing them, the other half is knowing yourself" (Schulte, 1999b). These student voices provided support for a perspective that I had assumed would be mostly my own in this discussion.

Throughout this part of the discussion, I tried to maintain a "committed impartial" stance (Kelly, 1986). It was clear that I supported the ideas expressed by McIntosh, and yet I also invited students to critique the article. Sleeter (1995) warns that if students find social critique threatening, the teacher will "control the selection and flow of ideas, which many students experience as coercive rather than liberating" (p. 416). Therefore, I responded to the students' critique with some affirmation of their point while sometimes further clarifying my stance. For example, when Sandy said McIntosh unfairly "clumped" all males together and that men were more aware these days, I agreed but asked her if she concurred that our society was still generally male-dominated. I believe my students expect me to share my opinions and expertise as a teacher

so I am comfortable explicitly supporting particular perspectives. I was pleased that this early in the semester some students felt comfortable dissenting.

I asked the students to provide feedback at the end of the seminar meeting. Most of them commented that they enjoyed the discussion very much. A couple expressed their appreciation for discussing topics they felt were important. One student wrote, "I really enjoyed seminar today. This was the kind of discussion that I feel we should be having after four years of schooling. I hope that we can talk more about what it means to be teaching from a white perspective. I would be interested in talking about how we can learn about the heritage of our students while still respecting them. Maybe circulating a list of resources or conversation starters."

The Follow-up Discussion

A month later I assigned my students to read four pages of the transcript from the previous discussion. The opening question was "What are our concerns about meeting needs? What do you get from reading this that speaks to our frustrations?" My goal for the discussion was that students would have opportunities for sharing their frustrations while trying to understand them from other perspectives. I was hoping that the students would pull out issues from the transcript that were still frustrating for them, reflect on how we were approaching them in the last discussion, and possibly reconsider some of their positions. I also hoped that students would be able to offer "solutions" based on their reflections on the original discussion.

The students did revisit the issues present in the transcript, but they also expanded on why particular things were or were not still issues for them. Susan recognized how the passage of time eased some of her angst. "I think too we're starting to see progress. So maybe I didn't get to that kid that one day, but I eventually did get to that kid and look at how much he learned. That's

made me feel a lot better" (Schulte, 1999c). Other students pointed to ways they have worked on their ability to meet needs, such as using wait time effectively, restating their questions, or watching a videotape of themselves teaching.

This discussion certainly did not directly address the same kinds of issues of privilege and difference as the first one did. However, the student teachers did talk about ways they were practicing perspective-taking. We revisited the question from the first discussion about why parents would behave in a way that seemed uncaring. Anna told a story about parents who did not want to come to conferences because they knew they were going to hear only negative things about their child. "And they don't want to come to a place where all they're going to hear is negative things. And I don't blame them" (Schulte, 1999c). Other students shared stories about how they learned to consider different perspectives their cooperating teachers might hold when trying to understand confusing interactions the student teachers had with them.

Kelly was still struggling with how, in a classroom of twenty-five, she decided which students to attend to and why.

> "Because there's not enough time and you really have to make choices about who you help... I was having trouble with the kids who are in special ed. I don't feel like there's always enough communication between, I don't really know the ability level of the special ed. kids or what they are really capable of. It's just really hard to know the balance. When are you helping them? When are you not helping them by giving too much help? When are you hurting them by all of a sudden being like all of a sudden "That's it, you're out of here! You're done" (Schulte, 1999c).

Clearly, Kelly is very reflective about her actions as a teacher and also about the teachers she observes. These questions are centered on her practice and how what she believes will influence how her students learn. Part of her anxiety is her need to survive in the classroom, but part of it is a real concern about her power as teacher. Kelly was examining issues of ability and

asking meaningful questions about what causes teachers to pay attention to some students more than others. These questions will hopefully lead her to other questions that will cause her to continue reflecting and challenging her thinking.

Conclusion

I believe that my use of discussion is a very small but significant first step at persuading student teachers to challenge their own beliefs and assumptions. Through these discussions, I am disrupting the way many students have learned to achieve by creating dissonance and uncertainty. However, I hope to show preservice teachers that "staying open to the mystery, to the recognition that there is always more to know and more to be, is to allow students their full humanity, and to stay alive as a teacher" (Ayers, 1993, p. 49).

The combination of field experiences in diverse settings and weekly discussions provides excellent opportunities for student teachers to examine what they believe and how that actually influences classroom activities. Discussions, as well as other forums for communication, help me to create cultural disruptions as well as assess student teachers' reflection and their transformation process. I believe that through developing nurturing relationships with my student teachers and working at my skills as a facilitator I can effectively create positive spaces within seminar to discuss the things we take for granted about teachers, students, and schooling.

It is important to note that I undertake this action research in hopes of modeling the process of self-inquiry and assisting student teachers in their transformations, but ultimately I also hope to become transformed by the process. However, possibly the greatest challenge in my self-study is that in order to further my own transformation, I must continually question the assumptions I make about the benefits of transformation, what it looks like, and my ability to foster it in others.

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